

Giving the Gift of Reptiles

We love reptiles, but think carefully before giving reptiles as gifts.

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Don't give live reptiles for gifts without due diligence.

Did you hear that loud thud last week? That was the arrival of the official all-get-out holiday gift-giving season crashing down among us. I was out at the stores on Black Friday, still full of turkey from the night before. The crowds were beginning, but I don't think it was anywhere near as zoo-like as previous years at the stores. A sign of the times, perhaps, but hopefully many businesses will be okay come the end of the year.

As thoughts turn to gift giving, you may consider giving some live reptiles to someone on your list. Of course I'm typically all for the wide dissemination of reptiles and amphibians, but I did want to discuss the topic of giving reptiles as presents because there are some things to think about before doing so.

Number one, above all else, is to never give a reptile as a gift on impulse. Just as I frequently harp on the need to refrain from impulse buying for ourselves, likewise do I recommend not engaging in this activity with someone else in mind. While we may figure there's a good chance a reptile-keeping friend or family member would always be open to the idea of receiving a new reptile, this may not be the case. Maybe that person has reached the maximum number of animals he or she can properly maintain, or maybe an animal we thought would be enjoyed wouldn't be.

I also don't usually recommend buying a reptile for someone who has never actually kept reptiles before. Maybe you remember someone expressing a casual interest in reptiles, and maybe even saying something about wanting to start keeping them. That's great, but don't run out and buy a reptile for someone who has said such things because they may not be taking into consideration important factors. The only way I would recommend giving a reptile as a present to someone under these circumstances would be if the person you were buying the reptile for was in on it and an enthusiastic and, more importantly, educated participant in the process. It's easy to say, "I want a pet iguana," but someone who says that needs to know what having a pet iguana will mean, both at the outset and in the future as the lizard grows.

Be real careful if you're thinking of giving a live reptile to a child. I wouldn't be in a rush to do so unless I knew the child very well and was absolutely certain the reptile would receive the attention it needed to thrive. Plus, having the parents' word that they will step in to care for the reptile if the child begins to neglect it could provide some insurance against a possibly bleak future scenario.

I'm not advising that you never buy a pet reptile for someone as a gift. Just never do it on a whim. Do some detective work, and use your common sense, too. Be 100-percent sure the person to whom you want to bestow a live reptile will take good care of it. Even if it means giving the person a hint of what's coming. If you really want to give a new pet reptile to somebody, it's better to sacrifice some of the surprise if it means the reptile will have a better chance of being placed in a good home. That's the best outcome one could hope for, for both the receiver of the gift and, especially in this case, the gift itself.

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